

HB 5368: Testimony of the Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association, February 23, 2011

Good afternoon Senator Meyer, Representative Roy, Members of the Environment Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you in support of House Bill 5368. My name is Gayle Block and I am a practicing Veterinarian in Connecticut.

I would like to address this bill from an ethical point of view. Let me begin by saying I have always felt more of an obligation to my patients, the animals, than my clients. I believe it is my highest responsibility to act in the best interests of my patients and I have always taken that responsibility very seriously. That being said let me say unequivocally, we are not against the adoption of animals that are in need of homes. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, my own dog came from the Bridgeport municipal pound. I am a huge proponent of adopting from shelters and pounds.

Since the State of Connecticut, Department of Agriculture began the Animal Population Control Program more than 15 years ago; we have seen many more adoptions occur from shelters and the euthanasia of unowned animals decrease significantly. This program promotes the spaying or neutering of animals adopted from municipal pounds. That success, however, doesn't mean that the problem of pet overpopulation in Connecticut is solved or that there are not still many animals without homes that are euthanized.

This bill would in no way prevent the adoption of animals from in our state or out of state. It would only create responsibility among those involved in arranging adoptions and promote in state adoptions first.

Unfortunately, with no laws directly governing the importation of companion animals into Connecticut we have seen many problems occur, including significant health issues. Intestinal parasites, heartworm disease, respiratory and dermatologic illnesses and malnutrition are just a few of them. I personally have seen more cases of heartworm disease these past few years than I can ever remember. Worse, many of these illnesses are contagious to the pets already living in the State of Connecticut.

In many cases, because these animals are essentially sold directly from transport vehicles, there is no recourse for the adoptive family that has usually paid hundreds of dollars for their new pet. They then become saddled with the financial burden of treatment and if they can't afford treatment they may then relinquish them to local animal control facilities that are not able to treat them either, and they are euthanized.

In fact, animal trafficking has become so lucrative that some are breeding specifically for transport to the north. It is outrageous that, we still must kill thousands of healthy, adoptable cats and dogs due to pet overpopulation, while some profit from so called rescue. Meanwhile people are paying exorbitant amounts of money for so called adoption donations, not knowing and understanding that there has been no oversight to this process.

The transportation itself may be inhumane, by packing too many animals together in one transport vehicle, not stopping often enough or at all to provide clean water and food, not

cleaning their cages and leaving them in their own excrement, and lacking temperature control. There can be 100 animals in one vehicle alone. There have even been instances of cats being transported here for adoption. In this state, there is no doubt in my mind that cat overpopulation far outnumbers the dog overpopulation. In one shelter not 10 miles from here, there are over 100 cats needing homes. There are also many thousands of feral cats that breed a number of times in a season leaving us with more and more unwanted cats. Very few municipalities deal with this stray cat population. Shouldn't we be taking care of business in our own state first? Don't we all have a responsibility to see that these pets transported into Connecticut are healthy and treated humanely?

Those that truly care about the health, well being and placement of unowned animals will continue to do so while working within the confines of our laws. Importers should be made to comply with the same laws that legitimate in state adoption agencies, pet stores and breeders do.

Thank you

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